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WHEN ROCHAMBEAU STEPPED ASHORE

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GENERAL WASHINGTON *is escorted by the* COUNT *de* ROCHAMBEAU *to the* ALLIED HEADQUARTERS *at the* VERNON HOUSE, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, MARCH 6, 1781.

A Reconstruction of Life in Newport in 1780

Cover drawing by
EDITH BALLINGER PRICE

When Rochambeau Stepped Ashore

When Rochambeau Stepped Ashore

A Reconstruction of Life in Newport

in 1780

BY

ARTHUR TUCKERMAN

PUBLISHED BY
THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF NEWPORT COUNTY
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

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The Preservation Society of Newport County

Printed by
Remington Ward, Newport, Rhode Island

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COUNT DE ROCHAMBEAU

Foreword

To obtain full enjoyment from any festivity which commemorates a historical event we should try to project ourselves into the past. We should try to imagine the surroundings of the historical event at the time. What were the customs and habits of the people; what were their financial and political problems; what did they wear; what did they eat and drink? How, in fact, did they live?

What was the reaction, for instance, of the average Newport citizen in 1780 to the arrival of 6,000 French troops led by the Comte de Rochambeau and his gallant and distinguished officers? Many of these came from the first families of France, many were welcome at the court of their own sovereign, Louis XVI. Most of them were gay, witty, highly-polished products of France. It was a fascinating impact between two national cultures comparatively unknown to one another because of the lack of transatlantic communications at that time. And yet no visitor to the current Washington-Rochambeau Celebration in Newport should suspect for a moment that the good citizens of this town kow-towed or were subservient to the new arrivals, or had what we call in modern psychiatric jargon an inferiority complex towards them. For Newport in the Eighteenth Century held in a firm and intelli-

gent grasp the cultural leadership of the then unliberated Colonies of George the Third of England. There is even a letter said to have been written by George Washington to a friend in New York in which he stated that he was about to leave the "*City* of Newport for the *Town* of New York."

A City. One is inclined to smile at this definition of a little New England community of only 5,400 inhabitants. And yet it was a city in the cultural and cosmopolitan sense. When Rochambeau landed in 1780 Newport could point with pride to such renowned intellectual centres as the Redwood Library, founded over thirty years previously by Abraham Redwood, a prominent member of the Quaker Community, the initial impetus having been supplied by the Philosophical Society organized by the renowned Bishop Berkeley who came to these shores in 1728. From the day of its inception the Redwood flourished and grew, attracted scholars and students from all parts of the colonies and many distinguished visitors from overseas. We must note, too, that the Old Colony House, that superb example of Colonial architecture, standing at the head of Washington Square — then called the Grand Parade — by no means confined its activities to affairs of state and dry-as-dust sessions of the Courts. All kinds of public meetings, religious and social functions, were held within its walls. Actually the first lectures on medical science to be delivered in the New World were given in the Old Colony House, later destined to become Rhode Island's State Capitol. Newport even had its own newspaper in those days — the oldest in the country. Founded in 1758 and published continuously since then except during the British occupation, *The Mercury* still

GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON

thrives today. But perhaps the most warming and human illustration of Newport's cultural attainments in the Eighteenth Century is the recorded fact that when Rochambeau's young French officers were introduced to "many lovely local maidens" the Frenchmen were flabbergasted to discover that many of the Newport girls could converse with them in their own language and were almost as familiar with French literature as they were themselves.

To sum up, this little booklet has but one objective, — to try to reconstruct the human story of a fabulous event in our American history, not too widely known except among scholars and students. It is a heartwarming story in a sense — almost a love story, if there can be love stories between nations as between individuals, with all the attendant lovers' tiffs and quarrels. Political relationships between nations are no more static than individual human relations. So, when you read this tale today please try not to think of the current French political system and the irritating vagaries of the Chamber of Deputies and their maddening changes of government. Do not think of Newport, Rhode Island, today with its local political problems. Think of its ancient heritage. There is something undying and undefeatable about Newport, no matter what may be the passing foibles and fallacies of various generations.

It happens to be one of those strange, odd little corners of the earth which defy time because they are somehow greater than the successive human generations which inhabit them. We all of us know towns like these. I personally know four. One is in Belgium, one in Switzerland, one in the Far West of the United States. The fourth is here, where I

live. None of these communities have today anything in common except that intangible quality called character. They are eternally themselves, and therefore indestructible.

ARTHUR TUCKERMAN

OLD HOUSES ON WASHINGTON STREET

I

What Newport Was Like

IT was a tiny village of white houses screened by the ripe foliage of Aquidneck Island, yet it was the cultural centre of the American colonies. When Bishop Berkeley landed in 1728 from Ireland he was met by the Redwoods from Antigua, the De Courcys from Ireland, the Grants from Scotland and the Bretts from Germany. Newport was mainly a town of simple gambrel-roofed houses, yet it possessed that personality which certain individuals have; it was a focal point of dignity and elegance and a very prosperous town as well because of New England shrewdness. For many years prior to the Revolutionary War Newport had traded actively with Charleston, South Carolina, and the West Indies. In 1771 Charleston wanted to give a big party in connection with the St. Cecilia Society and actually had to advertise in Newport to obtain first-class musicians. Newport was doing a vast and roaring trade entirely apart from its cultural heritage.

Then came the War of the Revolution in 1776. This brought disaster. As is generally known, the British occupation was far from a happy one. Commerce was destroyed and great damage was done to the town. Many buildings were destroyed, but Trinity Church was spared because of the crown on

its spire. The Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, General Prescott, was not popular, being arrogant and condescending with the Colonial "Rebels." And yet, as there seems to exist in all armies, he had a younger man in his command, one Frederick MacKenzie, who was able to write a keen, sympathetic diary of the British occupation of Newport, in which he reveals, almost unconsciously, an affection for this strange new land. Here are a few random quotations from young MacKenzie's diary:

> "There is a hill about seven miles from Newport and on the Eastern side of the Island called Quaker Hill . . . from whence there is a very fine view of all the N. part of the Island, and the beautiful bays and inlets, with the distant views of towns and farms and cultivated lands intermixed with woods. Together with many views of the adjacent waters [they] contribute to make this even at this bleak season of the year, the most diversified and extensive prospect I have seen in America . . . In the beginning of Summer this must be a delightful view, and I should think hardly to be equalled in America or any other country."

Again on July 11, 1777.

> "Last night a party of Rebels landed behind General Smith's late quarters at Redwood, from whence they advanced to General Prescott's quarters . . . They laid hold of Genl. Prescott and carried him off, also Lieut. Barrington, his aide . . . The Rebels certainly ran a great risk in making this attempt. They, however, executed it in a masterly manner. It is certainly a most extraordinary circumstance that a General commanding a body of 4,000 men, encamped on an Island surrounded by a squadron of Ships of War should be carried off from his quarters at night by a small party of the enemy, and without a shot being fired."

Dec. 20, 1777.

"This harbour is now fuller of shipping than it has been at any time since our first arrival, there being near 100 sailing vessels."

Lieutenant MacKenzie's diary ends in December, 1778 although the British fleet did not leave until October, 1779. By that time Newport was a poverty-stricken community. Grass grew in the streets. A nominal garrison of American troops was quartered "for fear that the British fleet might return." Yet there was actually no reason for it to return. Many of Newport's houses had been destroyed and its commerce had been ruined. The winter of 1779 was the saddest that Newport has ever known. Prescott had fought the battle as he saw fit, but with little mercy to a civilian populace. He had allowed his men to do inestimable damage to the town while acting under orders of his Sovereign Majesty King George III. There are many parallels to his actions in military occupation throughout history, as any historian knows, and many of them far more violent and destructive than this particular occupation. If there are any comments to be made about Prescott in this day and age they are that he does not seem to have had any tact as an administrator, and — more important still — that it was far from intelligent of him to have been caught in bed with a local young charmer and thus be humiliatingly captured by a mere handful of American "Rebels." *

* Although I have succeeded in tracing no printed evidence of the circumstances of the General's downfall, it is so widespread and repeated a local legend among historians and scholarly men, that there must be truth in it, and it certainly answers MacKenzie's bewilderment over his sudden capture! See page 2.

II

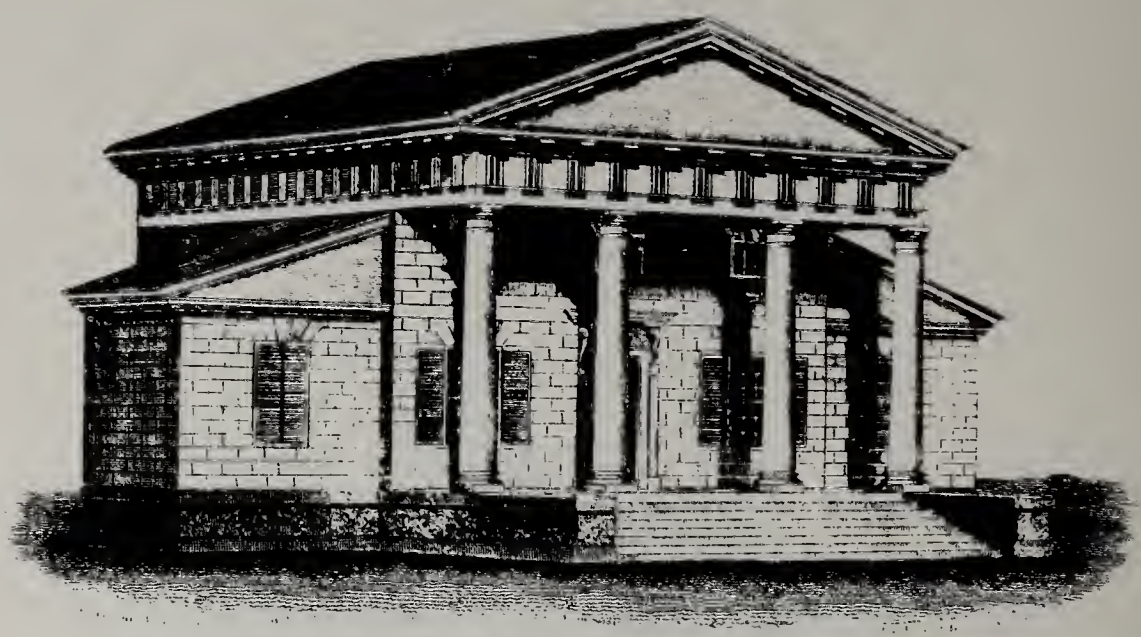
How It Happened

IN 1780 at the beginning of a cold, damp French March — and there can be nothing colder and damper than a French March unless it is a Newport one — Count Rochambeau was preparing to leave his Paris house for his country estate. He was a veteran soldier who had fought for France for many years, and was now tired and ill. He wanted a rest. But in the early morning of that March day he received a summons by a royal messenger, calling him to the Palace at Versailles where Louis XVI presided over the destinies of France.

The King, far younger than Rochambeau, handed him two letters, the gist of which was that General Rochambeau was to be in command of all French forces which would, in accordance with the Treaty of 1778, be sent to the aid of the "American Revolutionists" who were then fighting for Independence and the right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. A second stipulation was that General Rochambeau must at all times entrust his troops to the command of General Washington and to be himself at all times under Washington's command.

Louis XVI had originally planned to dispatch 12,000 men to the New World. But France was

THE EZRA STILES HOUSE ON CLARKE STREET



THE REDWOOD LIBRARY, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

NEWPORT HARBOUR

already at war with England and the Royal Treasury was at a low ebb. Rochambeau was only able to secure a single division of 6,000 troops which he assembled near the French seaport of Brest. Many gallant soldiers and noblemen of France trekked down there to offer their services. It was one of those ventures in history which had the precise ingredients of logic, sentiment and possible financial awards which appealed to the French character. It was a *beau geste* with the possibility of cashing in. So they thronged there by the hundreds down at Brest. From them Rochambeau chose only a few, —among them was Admiral Chevalier de Ternay as Commander of his fleet.

The brave and quixotic little French fleet appeared off Brenton Farm on July 10th, 1780. On the next day it entered Newport Harbour to disembark its troops. The point of landing is marked by a pyramid with General George Washington's greeting: "I welcome news of your arrival, a new mark of friendship."

The welcome of the Newporters for the French fleet after their trials and tribulations was enthusiastic beyond belief. The little town of white houses was illuminated. From the Grand Parade "thirteen grand rockets were fired." An early account of the proceedings states:

> "The brilliant appearance of the gentlemen officers of the Fleet and Army of our industrious ally, who were on the shore, with those of the ladies and gentlemen of the town, and the joy which everyone experienced on that happy occasion, afforded a most pleasing prospect of the future felicity and grandeur of our country."

Doctor Ezra Stiles, at that time President of Yale College, describes the scene in his diary:

> "On 11th July inst. arrived at Newport, R. I., a Fleet from France consisting of forty-four Sail . . . The fleet is commanded by His Excellence Mon. le Chevalier de Ternay and the troops by His Excellence le Comte de Rochambeau. In consequence of which the Town was beautifully illuminated."

It was in this hectic spasm of excitement and admiration and friendship that Rochambeau established his headquarters in the beautiful Vernon House on Clarke Street. Meanwhile the French troops created their primitive fortifications on Aquidneck Island. Admiral de Ternay's fleet remained moored between Goat and Rose Islands.

From all accounts the Frenchmen, both enlisted men and officers, were completely enchanted by their new station and its inhabitants. Rochambeau's aide-de-camp, a young baron named Louis de Closen, made this comment about the women of Newport — and one can always trust an aide-de-camp to report accurately upon this particular aspect of international relations:

> "Nature has endowed the Ladies of Rhode Island with the handsomest, finest features one can imagine. Their complexion is clear and white; their hands and feet unusually small."

A little while later the good Baron jots down a few condescending comments on American social life in general. He says:

> "During a meal one leans against one's neighbor and one sits with one's elbows on the table while eating, and what in France is considered ill-bred is here con-

THE PARADE

MARKET HOUSE

COLONY HOUSE

THE VERNON HOUSE

sidered quite correct and universally accepted. The personal appearance of the American man in general is careless, almost indifferent, and one cannot but be astonished that, with all this apparent indifference, when the occasion presents itself, he fights with unquestioned courage and valor . . . Another peculiarity of this country is the absence of napkins, even in the homes of the wealthy. Napkins, as a rule, are never used and one has to wipe one's mouth on the tablecloth, which in consequence suffers in appearance. Also the people, nearly all of them, eat with their knives, like the English, which are round at the point and they do not use their two-pronged forks."

But then, like any Frenchman, he reverts to his favorite theme:

"I will finish by saying that the fair sex is really quite extraordinary as to their charm and kindness. Nature has vouchsafed the greatest possible beauty of feature, their complexion is white and clear, their hands and feet are as a rule small, but their teeth are inferior, for which the great amount of tea which they drink may be responsible. One rarely sees a woman with a bad figure. Their style of dress and the way of arranging their hair is quite English. Nevertheless, French fashions are not unknown to them. One feels sure that the visit of the French Army will have its good influence upon them in this respect."

For an entirely different point of view let us glance at the recorded impression of Newport by Claude Blanchard, a hard-headed businessman who was no less a person than the Commissary-in-Chief of the French Forces. Blanchard complains:

"The Americans are slow and do not decide promptly in business. They love money and hoard money. They do not eat soups and do not serve ragouts at their din-

> ners, but boiled and roast [meats] and much vegetables . . . Their coffee is weak and four or five cups are equal to one of ours."

This latter comment strikes us as somewhat strange today when the quality of French coffee is often one of the major discouragements of the American tourist travelling in France.

ADMIRAL DE TERNAY'S GRAVE IN TRINITY CHURCHYARD

NORTHEAST PARLOR, HUNTER HOUSE

III

Life and Love During the French Occupation

IN general the relations between townsfolk and the French were good. The town had suffered under Prescott and any liberating force has naturally the advantage of any enemy force of occupation. And yet, as summer turned into autumn, sentiments cooled along with the weather. The town had only 5,400 inhabitants and there were 6,000 troops quartered on Aquidneck Island alone. Even Rochambeau wrote dispiritedly to Necker, the French Minister of Finance:

> "There is not one citizen here who is not quite well off, but not one gives a thing, not a house for quarters, not a piece of land to camp upon without wanting money."

And Rochambeau's son, Viscount Donatien de Rochambeau, lamented that the people were now beginning to become indifferent as to the outcome of the war. The truth was that Newport was both poverty-stricken and weary. Its citizens had undergone too many hardships.

But this happily was only a seasonal mood. The first excitement about the French landing was over, the initial curiosity of discovering new friends had evaporated. What we must bear in mind is that these were the bleak months when the warmth of

human nature flickered but that it did not die out. The Rochambeau story in its entirety remains an exotic and gallant little episode in our American history. It created — with minor irritations and misunderstandings it is true — a friendship and an intimacy between two widely dissimilar peoples who had never before communicated with one another on any large scale, except for an occasional visit of some learned man of letters from France, such as Tallyrand, who paid a brief and mysterious visit to Newport in the spring of 1794. From any creative artist's point of view the Rochambeau occupation holds all the essentials of a musical extravaganza. It was war, and life, and love combined in a New England setting, with the glamorous costumes and courtly manners of the aristocratic French officers to lend sharp color to the simple background of grace and courtesy and dignity provided by the ladies of the Quaker Community.

In those days young men and women graced the minuet. The thin quavering music was that of the spinet, the flute and the viol. Seven o'clock was the hour mentioned on most cards of invitation, and guests were expected to be punctual. According to historians the arrival of the French Fleet was followed by a round of gaiety.

> "Balls and Parties were of daily occurrence, and on the 25th of August, the anniversary of the birth of St. Louis . . . there was a *feu du joie* fired by the numerous forts, earthworks and batteries, followed by a salute of twenty one guns from each of the ships in the harbour. When the noise had subsided, the Comte de Rochambeau, the Chevalier de Ternay (his admiral) and a

brilliant company of ladies and gentlemen reviewed the army . . . "

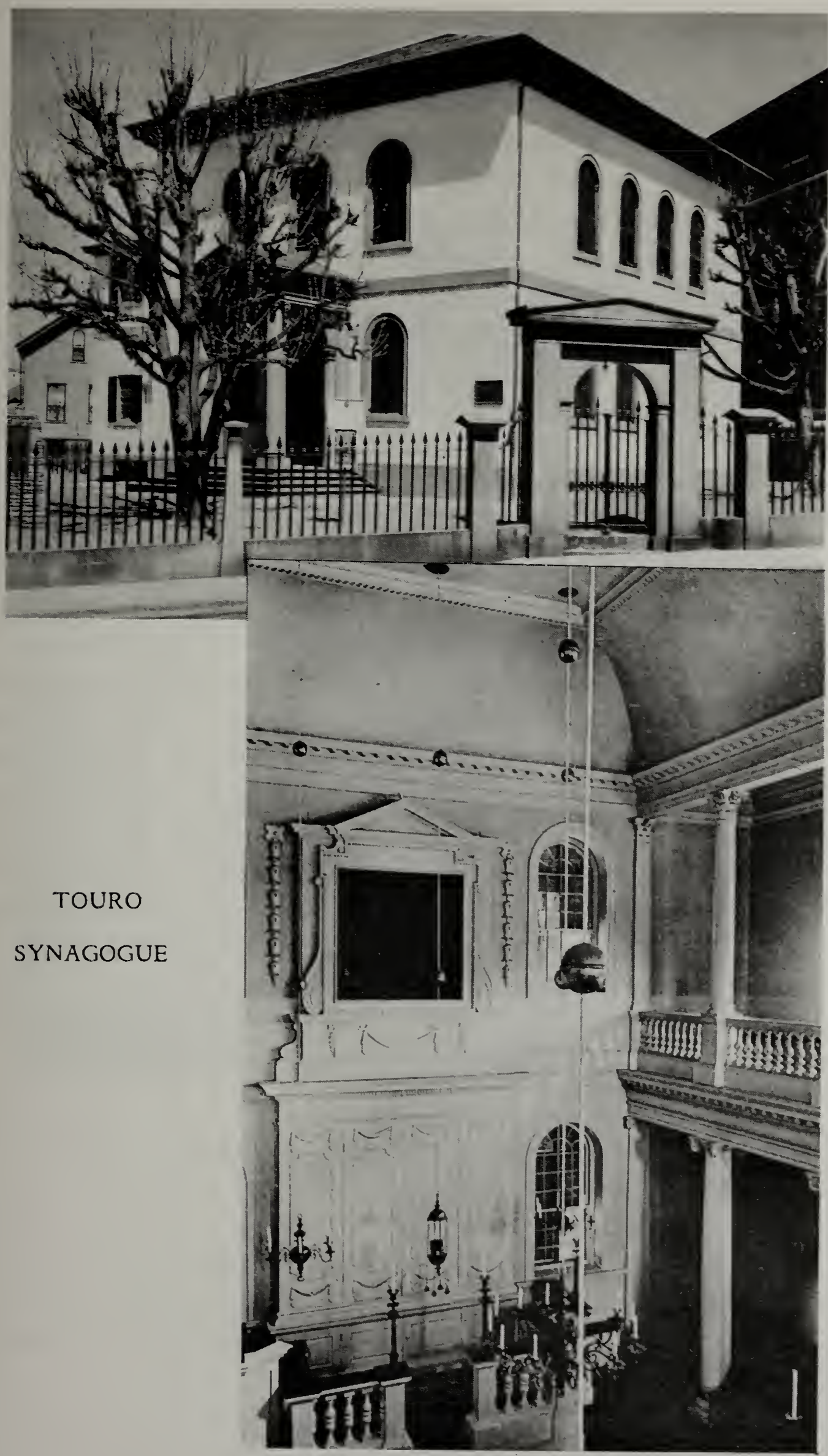
Admiral de Ternay died in December, 1780, and his death cast a gloom over Newport. He was buried in Trinity Church cemetery, where his grave should be visited today by all pilgrims to Newport. Like many another French nobleman, he lived in Newport in that section which is now called "The Point." In those days the waterfront, then known as Water Street and now known as Washington Street, was lined with wharves and crowded with stores. If you, the temporary visitor to Newport, wish to recapture something of the spirit and the feeling of our town in Rochambeau's days, wander down on foot to Washington Street on a warm summer's evening. Note the old houses wherein Admiral de Ternay and Vicomte de Noailles established their headquarters. They are well marked by tablets erected by the Tercentenary Committe of Newport and maintained by the Preservation Society of Newport County. Now the signs of commerce can barely be traced and all the stir and hum of trade have vanished. But note the picturesque gables of the grand and dignified old houses, in contrast with the severe lines of others with gambrel roofs, and the elaborate doors that trace their origin to the Georgian school of architecture.

There was no racial or religious animosity in Newport at that time — nor is there much of it today. Newport has always been tolerant and has managed to play ball with its various racial and religious composites. In 1780 the Jews and the Christians lived side by side, cultivating the most friendly

relations, prospering and growing rich together. The Jews, who came from Portugal and Holland, introduced the processing of spermaceti — or whale oil — on "The Point." Others followed. In 1774, six years before Rochambeau landed, no less than seventeen whaling ships entered Newport harbor, some of them from such faraway places as the Falkland Islands. Everybody in the community joined in this great enterprise to provide oil for the lamps of the colonies. A syndicate was formed by such diversified interests as Nicholas Brown and Company of Providence. Jacob Rodriguez Rivera of Newport, and Thomas Robinson — "Quaker Tom" Robinson of Newport, as he was familiarly called by those who knew him well.

Here again we have another striking example of Newport's early cultural leadership. In 1763 the Touro Synagogue was dedicated — one of the first Jewish places of worship in the American Colonies. Rabbi Isaac Touro came to Newport via the West Indies, having gone there from Portugal. When the War of the Revolution was over the first meeting of the General Assembly of Rhode Island was held in the Touro Synagogue.

To Water (Washington) Street came Admiral de Ternay, who established his headquarters in what is now known as the Hunter House. No visitor to Newport should miss this graceful example of Newport's manner of living in its early days, beautifully preserved and restored to the epoch as it has been through the constant devotion and hard work and financial contributions of the members of the Preservation Society. Characteristic is the front door



TOURO

SYNAGOGUE

TRINITY CHURCH, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

surmounted by a pediment with terminal volutes and enriched by carved bunches of grapes and leaves. Note the large, boldly-cut pineapple, a form of symbolism, no doubt, of which the origin is untraceable.

Just above the Hunter House on Water Street was the home of "Quaker Tom" Robinson. It is still standing. Thomas Robinson was a highly successful merchant in Newport. He was married to Sarah Franklin, the daughter of an equally wealthy Quaker merchant of New York. History says that she was "a beautiful brunette" and that she was sixteen when "Quaker Tom" first met her. They were "united" in the Friends Meeting House in New York.

The house of the Quaker Robinsons became for sundry and obvious reasons a magnet for the upper echelons — or "top brass" as we would say today — of the French. The Robinsons were wealthy. "Quaker Tom" was not only a successful businessman but a very cultured gentleman. They lived exceedingly well, and in addition to these attractions, they possessed three "beautiful and accomplished daughters." The French officers were in the habit of saying that Mrs. Robinson and her three daughters could have graced any court in Europe.

Mrs. Robinson had already had her troubles concerning her daughters Mary and Abby during the British occupation, when several officers of rank were quartered in the Robinson house. Two of these officers became so ardent over Mary and Abby that their mother shipped the girls off on a long and arduous voyage — not to Europe as contemporary parents do to the lovelorn, but by ferry all the way

across Narragansett Bay to Narragansett town. There the girls remained until the British left.

But Mrs. Robinson's troubles were not yet over. Into this Quaker house came the Vicomte de Noailles, the gay and gallant assistant of Rochambeau. A fashionable and gay Parisian, he brought with him his own cook, valet and servants. It was through his brother-in-law, the Marquis de Lafayette, that he became carried away by a desire to participate in the American Revolution. To make a long story short, he sailed with Rochambeau and arrived in Newport in July, 1780. Apparently he was somewhat temperamental. Here is the account from the recorded annals of the Newport Historical Society:

> "The Vicomte de Noailles, membre de l'Assemble Constituante, was the second son of the Marechal de Mouchy, head of the younger branch of the de Noailles family. They were of the best of the old French aristocracy. In one of the family memoirs, the Vicomte is called 'the heroic descendant of a warlike race, of which he showed himself so worthy.' He married his cousin, Mlle. Louise de Noailles, daughter of the Duc and Duchesse d'Ayen, and sister of Mme. de Lafayette. Their mother was a woman of great piety and spirituality, caring little for the gaities of the Court and spending most of her time in retirement, devoting herself to the education of her family."

It was through his brother-in-law, Lafayette, that the Vicomte de Noailles first became carried away by the desire of coming to America to help the cause of liberty. How much of their desire was really to help this cause and how much to add to their own military glory is not for us to determine.

When the wishes of the young men became known to the family, every possible obstacle was put in their way; the King himself, forbidding them to leave the country. Lafayette, having his own private fortune, persevered, chartered a vessel, and sailed away. DeNoailles, dependent upon his family, was forced to yield. However, when the second expedition, under Rochambeau, took place, he sailed with it, and as we have already seen, arrived in Newport in July, 1780.

As the Viscomte was a married man, Mrs. Robinson relented and allowed her exiled daughters to return to her house on Water Street. And, as a historian states, she allowed them in his presence and "during his stay they availed themselves of the opportunity to perfect themselves in French."

At this point the little Quaker girl, Molly Robinson, enters the picture. With her de Noailles appears to have established a most tender and affectionate friendship, and their correspondence continued for many months after the Frenchman left Newport. If one may hazard a guess about two people, long since dead, it was one of those unrequited romances with which history is filled and in which both parties obeyed the rules — the pretty little Quaker girl and the sophisticated, far older, French nobleman. Of this correspondence, persistent in spite of all the hazards and delays of eighteenth century communications, here is one touching example.

From Molly Robinson to the Vicomte de Noailles.

Newport June 6, 1781

"Since I wrote last I have had the pleasure of receiving thine of the 17th and the pain of perusing one

of the 19th — both from Providence. Pardon the latter expression, it is rough. The sensation which directs my pen is not. I confess I was hurt at admitting that it is in the power of absence to reduce a friend to an acquaintance, or of time to banish him from memory. Indeed we should think it injurious while our hearts speak a language so different. And so you have bid a long adieu to this part of the country and are going far from us, but my letters shall pursue thee . . . How has thee contrived, Count de Noailles, to conceal from us the courtier, which might have dazzled our eyes without touching our hearts, and to appear to us only in the endearing light of a friend? May God Almighty preserve thee in every danger prays

M. R.

31st of Ye 6th Month, 1781"

Could any letter be more tender, more feminine, more unconsciously self-revealing, including as it does those proud words "without touching our hearts?"

There is a quaint aftermath to the story. After Noailles' return to France his wife, the Comtesse de Noailles, sent to Mrs. Robinson a complete set of the finest Sevres porcelainware with the following letter:

"Madam, — I do not know whether you will forgive my indiscretion, but your friendly kindness for my husband affects me so truly that I cannot deny myself the pleasure of telling you how much and with what sincerity I united with him in gratitude for all your favors. Since you know him, Madam, you will be able to judge of my uneasiness and of the continual alarms I am exposed to on his account. From what he has told me of your sensibility and tender feelings, I hope it will be pleasing to you to hear in procuring him a happy life you also give some consolation to a heart

SEVRES TEA SET PRESENTED TO MRS. ROBINSON
BY VISCOUNTESS DE NOAILLES

Madam

I do not know whether you will forgive my indiscretion, but your friendly kindness for my husband affects me so truely that I cannot deny my self the pleasure of telling you how much — and with what sincerity I unite with him in is gratitude for all your favours. Since you know him madam you will be able to judge of my uneasiness and of the continual alarms I am exposed to on his account! from what he has told me of your sensibility and tender feelings I hope it will be consoling to you to hear that in procuring him a happy life, you also give some consolation to a heart almost broken with such variety of affliction! I have a double obligation to you madam for having admitted him into an intimate acquaintance in your family: he will see there each day that real happiness is not — to be found in the pursuit of military glory; to which nevertheless, men make cruel sacrifices! may I hope, madam, that you will

permit me to present you some tea cups of a manufactory we have here and that in drinking your tea with your charming daughters you will some times think of me.

j should look upon it as a great happiness if circumstances should ever procure me an opportunity to offer you my self the homage of all those sentiments you have inspired me, and with wich j have the honour to be

madam
your most humble
and most obidient servant.

Paris. 10ber 1781.

Noailles de Noailles

FACSIMILE OF THE LETTER TO MRS. ROBINSON
FROM VISCOUNTESS DE NOAILLES

MISS POLLY LAWTON

almost broken with such variety of affliction! I have a double obligation to you, madam, for having admitted him into an intimate acquaintance in your family. He will see there, each day that real happiness is not to be found in the pursuit of military glory, to which, nevertheless, men make cruel sacrifices!

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Your most humble and most obedient servant,

Noailles de Noailles

Paris 6th month, 1781."

There were numerous other romances going on at the same time. There was Polly Lawton, for instance, also the charming daughter of a Rhode Island Quaker. She is referred to in the Memoirs of the Comte de Segur, a brilliant and worldy historian of Rochambeau's staff. So smitten was he when he called at the Lawton house and was conversing with Polly's father that he wrote:

"The door of the drawing room opened and a being which resembled a nymph rather than a woman entered the apartment. So much beauty, so much simplicity, so much elegance, so much modesty, were perhaps never before confined in one person . . . She received us with an open ingenuousness which delighted me, and the use of the familiar word 'thou', which her sect prescribed, gave our new acquaintance the appearance of an old friendship."

And here we can perceive a very delicate and subtle furthering of the romance between the French

and the Americans of that day, — a matter of language. In France the "thee" and the "thou" connoted either family relationship or the greatest terms of intimacy between men and women. How astonishing it must have seemed to the Frenchman to have sailed 3,000 miles across the ocean to a foreign land, and to be greeted by well-educated and attractive young women who not only spoke French but addressed them in the language of their family bosom.

There are ample diaries and memoirs of the Rochambeau occupation to substantiate the fact that the Frenchmen were completely captivated by Newport's fair sex. Baron de Closen, Prince de Broglie, and Comte de Segur, among many others, describe the charms of the Quaker belles in lyric terms. "Newport" de Broglie wrote "possessed more than one rosebud." And it is to him that we are indebted for a minute description of the Quaker dress of the day. Of Polly Lawton he wrote that she spoke:

> "with a grace and simplicity only to be compared to that of her costume. This was a species of English gown, close to the figure, white as milk, an apron of the same whiteness, a fichu very full and firmly fastened. Her head dress was a simple little cap of very fine muslin, pleated and passed around the head which allowed only half an inch of hair to be visible . . . Whenever I recall her image I am tempted to write a great book against the dressing the theatrical graces and the coquetishness of certain rich ladies much admired in the world of fashion."

IV

Washington Meets Rochambeau

ON the sixth of March 1781 General George Washington came to Newport to confer with Rochambeau concerning the future movements of the American and French armies. When he landed he found the French army standing at attention in double ranks all the way to the Colony House where Rochambeau was waiting to receive him and to give him the title of Marshal of France to insure his right of command over the French forces. It was probably the most gala event in Newport's entire history. As the two generals moved on to the Vernon House, where Washington shared Rochambeau's quarters during his brief stay of one week, the whole town was preparing for a celebration to outdo all celebrations. That evening, according to the local newspaper, *The Mercury,* the town and fleet were brilliantly illuminated. A state procession was led by thirty boys bearing candles, followed by General Washington, Count Rochambeau, their officers and aides, and a long file of citizens. The night was clear, with not a breath of wind to fan the torches, and the procession wound in and out of all the principal streets of town before returning to headquarters.* There followed a week of the

* It is intended to reproduce this event in the current Washington-Rochambeau Celebration of 1955.

greatest gaiety for Newport. There were the traditional processions by torchlight rendered by the French Army — Les Retraits aux Flambeaux — accompanied by the thin, high notes of the French trumpeters, and there were festivities and dancing in all parts of the town, but the most brilliant party of all was the one given by the officers of the French Fleet at Mrs. Cowley's Assembly Room on Church Street. Local hostesses lent silverware, as they still do today when the occasion requires, and the walls of the Assembly Room were draped with flags and bunting. These were in turn decorated with the swords and pistols of the participating officers.

The honor of opening the ball was naturally given to General Washington and when he led out the "beautiful" Miss Champlin* to start the dancing, every eye was upon them.

It was an evening filled with spirited gaiety, for at one point during the ball Rochambeau, disappointed with the performance of the locally-hired orchestra, took over the baton himself and he and his junior officers provided the music for a part of the evening.

The names of the dance tunes played that night sound odd to our modern ears. The opening number was "A Successful Campaign," followed by "Boston's Delight," "Flowers of Edinburgh," "Haymaking," "Innocent Maid" and many others. Thanks to the meticulous historians, the pattern of the dances themselves is here and there recorded.

* According to the French historians every Newport woman must have been "beautiful" in those days.

Here, for example, are some of the instructions for dancing to "A Successful Campaign":

> "Lead down two couples on the outside, up the middle
>
> "Second couple do the same
>
> "Turn contrary partners. Cast off right and cast off left . . ."

The ball lasted far into the night. Perhaps the thin reedy notes of the flute and the viol competed against the field sparrows at dawn. Perhaps the rhythmic postures of the minuet were still continuing . . . It was the climax, the apotheosis of the Rochambeau occupation presented in capsule form, a vignette of the formal elegance and beauty which prevailed. Washington left a few days later.

* * * *

Rochambeau broke camp three months later, and on June 6, 1781, the French army left on its long trek from Rhode Island to Virginia which was to end in Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown to the Americans and the French on an equal basis, thus terminating the War of the Revolution in complete victory. Since the Newport story is over it would seem inappropriate here to go into the vicissitudes and complications of that long march before the French joined Washington's forces at Waterman's Tavern in Coventry. The French averaged fifteen miles a day marching time with full packs, which is considered remarkable by authorities on such matters. Out of that long trek there is one happy echo which briefly sums up the gay, Gallic spirit and the

strange little romance between two nations which we have tried to depict in these pages. It is in the form of a despatch sent by Rochambeau to Count de Barras who remained at Newport in charge of the French Fleet:

> "We have made, my dear Admiral, the swiftest march to be here at General Washington's request and without leaving a man behind except ten amorous Soissonnais who probably have gone back to Newport to see their mistresses, and for whom I beg you to make a search."

THE END

WHALE OIL LAMPS

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